

Current Concerns

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English Edition of Zeit-Fragen

“The Swiss people want an independent agriculture”

Limiting imports could strengthen agriculture and national economy in developing countries

Interview with National Councillor Rudolf Joder



National Councillor
Rudolf Joder
(picture ma)

announced a counterproposal, but its content is not yet known. For me, there is no alternative such as a counterproposal to the food security initiative, which we submitted this summer with 150,000 signatures collected within only 4 months. This initiative has the following objective: ensuring a high percentage of food security; ensuring the good quality of agricultural products; preserving sufficient land reserves for agriculture; cost savings by reducing administrative efforts, which have greatly increased due to new regulations; providing better planning security, so that the farmer can plan his activities taking also entrepreneurial aspects into account. The Federal Council's counter proposal is only roughly sketched in its press release and seems very inconsistent. The Federal Office for Agriculture seemingly wants to create a “carte blanche” to be able to implement more agricultural free trade in the constitution.

In other words, in the Federal Council's view food security is ensured by further pushing the agricultural free trade.

Exactly, that's it. Federal Councillor Schneider-Amman declared this already by saying that the Swiss agriculture is only part of the overall food security, as it is integrated into a world food system. This means that a lot more and also cheap agricultural products are to be import-

Current Concerns: The Federal Council has planned a counter-proposal to the Initiative on Food Security. Is this counter-proposal an alternative to be seriously discussed?

National Councillor Rudolf Joder: The Federal Council has

ed from abroad. The Food Security Initiative is opposing this. At the time I was very much in favor of bringing a passage into the text of the Food Security Initiative that would restrict free trade. Unfortunately the farmer's association refused, which is why I brought in a parliamentary initiative, requiring that in free-trade agreements the import of foreign agricultural products is to be limited to protect domestic production.

Even today the Constitution requires that agricultural policy must ensure safe food for the population. Why do we still need another initiative determining that once more?

The initiative explicitly requires the above-mentioned five points. However, we would then have a provision to protect agricultural land, a provision concerning the quality of agricultural products, further we would reduce the administrative effort and we would have greater planning security and the explicit goal to produce as much food as possible in Switzerland. All this is not specified in the current Constitution in this form. Thus, a high degree of self-subsistence can be achieved, which today is at 50 percent. The initiative's goal is to keep this self-subsistence from decreasing.

Isn't this demand not granted with the Agricultural Policy 14-17? Doesn't it contribute to a higher degree of food security?

No, not at all. That is why we tried at that time everything to initiate a referendum. We narrowly failed, because neither the farmers' association, nor any other agricultural organization nor any political parties supported us. That's really unfortunate, as it was a fatal mistake which is hard to fix, now. With the AP 14-17 a new agricultural policy was implemented. That means, one wanted to get away as far as possible from agricultural produc-

Let's strengthen our sovereignty!

Do we want more gold in our National Bank's vault? Do we need more productive agriculture in our own country? To what extent should we open our country to immigration? How much importance should we assign to our national law? How strong and powerful should our army be? How much should our children learn at school and at university? All these questions have a central focus, namely our national independence, our state's sovereignty and our will to survive in a world of larger and smaller power interests as a neutral and freedom-loving small state with all its particularities such as direct democracy, federalism and a strong militia system.

While some perceive mankind's salvation in internationalism and in the large world community and at least verbally confess that they believe this idea to have a real chance, the political reality looks entirely different, and that not only as from today. The number of ongoing armed conflicts is high, and a generally peaceful world does not seem to be right on the doorstep. Of course we are free to adhere to the vision of an increasingly peaceful world, but to abandon an entire country to the world's more powerful states on the basis of this idea and in spite of the fact that there has never been as much talk about war as of late, is either naïve or serves an undeclared political agenda.

When we look at the debates of the last few years about the importance of agriculture and national defence, about energy supply and financial policy, about education and health policy, we cannot help thinking that there is a political class at work here, to whom the foundation of a state is not its independence and autonomy but its readiness to lean towards international organizations such as the EU, the NATO and others, which would to some extent result in a massive restriction of state sovereignty. But it is obvious that there is a large opposition.

More and more of those Swiss citizens who recognise this wrong orientation, are lining up to have their say, e.g. against a misguided education policy, as it is obvious to all critical contemporaries for instance in the revised form of

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tion to ecologization and enhancement of the quality of the landscape. Looking on now how public money is spent on nonsense such as landscape quality, it's effectively a policy which goes in a completely wrong direction. There is money spent on completely pointless and useless projects, which yield no added value.

What does this look like?

There are subsidies for nicely arranged dung heaps, wayside crosses, for stockades, particularly cultivated gardens, for orderly arranged bales of hay, all obviousness's which have nothing to do with a sustainable appreciation of the landscape. It is a misuse of public tax funds and public funds, which do not help better support the agriculture. The future of farming is defined by production and not by indolence.

Although the agricultural policy 14-17 is already in the implementation phase, funds are cut without real need. What is the reason, why this approach?

One wants to force the shrinking process of agriculture even further. The policy of the Federal Council and the Federal Office of Agriculture is becoming ever clearer and clearer. It is to open markets, to convert into an integral agricultural free trade. One is going away from production to ecologisation and landscape gardening, next one will lower the landscaping supporting funds in a second phase. Thus, the pressure on agriculture is continuously rising, the wedging policy is continued and the disappearance of the farms is accelerated. Since 2000, we've lost over 40,000 jobs in agriculture and over 13,000 farms. Apparently that is not enough. This policy is completely wrong. In the medium term it will prove to be a huge mistake to pursue this agricultural policy. It will cost a lot of energy to rebuild an independent agriculture. The international situation can change very rapidly. If a country cannot feed itself, it is completely dependent on its political environment and can be easily blackmailed. This is worrying me extremely.

And now the budget for agriculture will even be cut further?

That's the second aspect. A political duel is pursued with these cuts of next year's budget of over 100 million of direct payments: agriculture versus development policy. This is absolutely absurd and incomprehensible. By returning to an independent agricultural policy which would limit the imports, agriculture and general economy in developing countries could

be strengthened simultaneously just by not destroying all their domestic efforts with cheap imports from developed economies into these countries. From this point of view, this budget cut and budget discussion is completely absurd.

If I understand you correctly, also the reputation of the farmers is being attacked with this budget reduction and the following discussion because they are to be blamed as responsible for the reduction in development aid?

That's right. In addition it obstructs the agriculture's planning security. How can a farmer as entrepreneur set up his business properly if he never knows how many direct payments he will receive in the next year? That affects his entrepreneurial freedom, he cannot decide in the medium term if he doesn't know how much his income of direct payments will be. That is one of the reasons why we have demanded greater planning security with the food security initiative. It is very strange that with a federal budget of over 60 billion Swiss francs one has to save 100 million just in agriculture. This is consciously, deliberately and purposefully done.

Swiss agriculture is in accordance with the scientific findings from the World Agricultural Report that recognizes the small-scale family farms to be the future in agriculture. The Federal Council's agricultural policy aims at something else: a few big enterprises and free trade. This kind of policy will in turn do great damage to the developing countries, because it doesn't strengthen the peasants, but the agro-industry, which is obviously not able to feed humanity sufficiently.

Additionally, the environment is considerably impaired by the long transport distances resulting from international free trade. Food should be produced – and this is a principle which I support very much – where the population lives, which consumes it. This is a major contrast to industrial products, but this distinction is not made in the Federal Council's policy. Industrial production may certainly be based on labor division, but in the cultivation of cereals, sugar, also in the production of meat products or potatoes this is pointless. This is true as well when it comes to the free trade agreement with China. Why at all do we have to import chicken-meat and rabbit-meat from China? Isn't there a possibility to produce it in a perhaps even better quality in our vicinity? This is completely pointless.

These issues would need to be addressed especially by the left, although they show an astonishing sympathy for free trade.

That has changed in recent times. I've seen twice, recently that parliamentary

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Curriculum 21. In various cantons, initiative committees encouraging citizens to take education and school development back into their own hands have already established themselves. The Swiss federal government's misguided agricultural policy, which aims at a growing dependence on other countries, will be corrected by means of the people's initiative to strengthen food security which has so far received widespread support and which runs a significant chance to be accepted by the people and the states. The Initiative Committee must not be blinded by the Federal Council's counter-proposal to the extent of withdrawing its own initiative. The continuous military downsizing and the debt-cutting measures planned by the Federal Council are meeting increasing resistance by the parliament and the people. Two years ago, the Swiss citizens voted for the maintenance of the Swiss militia army and thus backed our independent national defence. That this did not make the army abolitionists back down lies in the nature of their strategy. But the Swiss people have the opportunity to take a stand for the maintenance and expansion of a powerful army, thereby strengthening the state's sovereignty.

Whatever the question concerning the core of our political system is: we, the citizens, have the unique opportunity to actively participate in all political and social events. We can decide whether we want to keep our direct democratic state and thus the sovereignty of our people. All political and social issues must be discussed openly and without manipulation, and it is our own decision whether we continue to live in a freedom-loving sovereign state, or if we allow ourselves to successively give up our freedom and independence. The latter alternative is hardly an option for a mature citizenry. •

The editors of Current Concerns

initiatives aiming at reducing the agricultural free trade or at implementing rules to limit the import of agricultural products to Switzerland succeeded in the National Council, but unfortunately not in the States Council. It was an Alliance of conservative/civic political parties, who strived for an independent production by Swiss farmers as entrepreneurs in an alliance with the left, the latter wanting developing countries to grow their products locally instead of having their markets destroyed by cheap imported products, and in an alliance with the Greens, which are annoyed by the high

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Letter to the Editor

Letter to  the Editor

Save our Swiss Gold – Yes to the “Gold Initiative”

[...] In 1944, a new international monetary regime was created for the period after the Second World War, the *Bretton-Woods Agreement*. Instead of gold, the dollar was to serve as a currency reserve and the United States pledged to keep the dollar stable and to sell or to buy gold at \$35 per ounce. At the same time the *International Monetary Fund* (IMF) and the World Bank were founded.

The result of the new monetary system was that the world was virtually flooded with dollars. The excess supply of dollars, the unstable exchange rate and the high public debt of the United States after the Viet Nam War resulted in the massive loss of value and purchasing power of the dollar.

In 1971, President *Richard Nixon* unilaterally cancelled the obligation to exchange dollars for gold. The gold standard was abolished and the system of pure paper money currency entered into force. It was the end of the Bretton Woods System, the final separation of the dollar from gold, however, with the dollar remaining the international reserve currency.

The cheated ones were the foreign banks which now had a weak dollar rather than gold as a currency reserve.

At that time, Switzerland was the only country with gold standard for its curren-

cy. Thanks to the gold standard Switzerland was independent of the dollar; the Swiss franc was stable, secure, and trustworthy for the investors.

The Swiss franc was as good as gold.

It is not he first “Gold Initiative”

The Gold Initiative “Save our Swiss Gold” is not the first initiative concerning the gold. The current situation:

1949: first vote about the gold “New monetary constitution and composition of the Currency Reserves”: the Federal Government can declare banknotes as legal tender; it determines nature and extent of cover. Keeping US dollars as reserve currency – rejected. Decision: The banknotes issued must be backed by gold.

1951: second gold initiative “New Constitution” – adopted. Decision: for more gold reserves. The gold standard of the franc as a constitutional principle is established in the Constitution.

1992: “Accession of Switzerland to the Bretton Woods institutions IMF and World Bank” – adopted.

1999: “New Federal Constitution” – adopted.

2002: third gold initiative “Excess gold reserves for the AHV Fund”(old age and survivors’ insurance), alternative initiative: “Money for the Solidarity Foundation” – both were rejected.

2006: fourth gold initiative “National Bank profits for the AHV” – rejected.

2014: Fifth gold initiative “Save our Swiss Gold” – not yet decided.

Under the auspices of the former head of the Financial Department the accession of Switzerland to the IMF and World Bank was forced. In the voting proposal for the 1992 accession to the IMF the Federal Council did not mention at all that an IMF membership prohibited gold as currency cover, and that the US dollar instead of gold was to guarantee the safety of the currencies. The gold standard of the Swiss franc, established in the Constitution, was contrary to the statutes of the IMF. The initiative was adopted. In 1999, the initiative “New Federal Constitution” was adopted by the people. The gold standard was quietly removed from the new Federal Constitution. There was neither public debate nor vote about the abandoning of the gold standard from the franc, and it was not mentioned in the voting booklet. It was only about updating and linguistic revision. The adapted new Federal Constitution came into force on the 1 January 2000. What the voters had rejected for decades could be promoted now. The paper money system could be introduced and the way was open for the sale of our national wealth. The SNB began to dump tons of “superfluous” gold reserves.

[...]

“Gold”, said *Alan Greenspan* in May 1999, “represents the ultimate means of payment. Fiat money, in extremis, is accepted by nobody, gold is always accepted.” [...]

Olena Geissbühler, 3655 Sigriswil

(Translation Current Concerns)

Alan Greenspan: “Gold stands as a protector of property rights”

“... gold and economic freedom are inseparable. (...) In the absence of the gold standard, there is no way to protect savings from confiscation through inflation. There is no safe store of value. If there were, the government would have to make its holding illegal, as was done in the case of gold. If everyone decided, for example, to convert all his bank deposits to silver or copper or any other good, and thereafter declined to accept checks as payment for goods, bank deposits would lose their purchasing power and government-created bank credit would be worthless as a claim on goods. The financial policy of the welfare state requires that there be no way for the owners of wealth to protect themselves. This is the shabby secret of the welfare statist’s tirades against gold. Deficit spending is simply a scheme for the confiscation of wealth. Gold stands in the way of this insidious process. It stands as a protector of property rights.”

Source: *Alan Greenspan, “Gold and Economic Freedom” in Capitalism: The Unknown Ideal, Ayn Rand, ed., New York: New American Library, 1966, p. 96, on the Internet <http://www.321gold.com/fed/greenspan/1966.html>. Cited in: *Lips, Ferdinand. The Battle Against Sound Money As Seen From A Swiss Perspective. New York, 2002, p. xvii**

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environmental impact by the transport of goods produced abroad, going almost halfway around the world. It worked twice, but unfortunately only in the National Council.

It would be of utmost importance that the issues of nutrition and the supply of the population with own products would be reconsidered ...

... Yes, the Initiative on Food Security is a very important step in this direction

and a last resort. That’s why we are committed to it. But it is imperative that the initiative is voted on by the people. Clearly, I resist a withdrawal, because this initiative is well formulated. There are essential aspects for the future agricultural policy included. Watering it down as the press release of the Federal Council indicates would mean to betray the agriculture and the population. There are no other words for this. It would be completely incomprehensible. We launched the initiative quite broadly. It has received great support in the population. That has never happened that so many

signatures were given in such a short time. In principle we would have been able to collect for another 14 months, and we would have even more signatures. The Swiss people want an agriculture, an independent agriculture, they want a productive agriculture. I am absolutely convinced. Therefore I am also urging the farmer’s association, to keep course and to stick to the initiative.

Mr National Councillor, thank you very much for the interview.

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

The end of the nineteenth century gold standard

"In 1914, at the beginning of World War I, the gold standard was thrown overboard within a few weekends. In order to finance wars, the world resorted to deficit financing and paper money. Had the gold standard not been given up, the war would not have lasted more than a few months. Instead, it lasted more than four years and ruined most of the major economies in the world and left millions dead in its wake."

Lips, Ferdinand. Gold Wars. New York, 2002, p. 20

"Although it was the firm intention to return to the pre-war gold standard, the major nations, with the exception of the U.S.A., decided in favor of introducing a dangerous surrogate. At the Genoa Conference in 1922, the Gold Exchange Standard was introduced, under which the dollar and the pound were as good as gold and could be held as reserve currencies. Unfortunately, the world did not return to the classical gold standard. What everybody should have known is that these currencies had lost purchasing power and could be expected to lose even more in the future. They could, therefore, not be as good as gold."

Lips, Ferdinand. Gold Wars. New York, 2002, pp. 21/22

"The new system set a gigantic money and credit machine in motion and created the inflationary boom of the 1920s. In the beginning it seemed to function, as it depended more on paper than on gold. But in time, the new mechanism proved an engine of inflation whose product, excess purchasing media, flowed abundantly into the real estate market and the stock market. The re-

sult was a mania that led to the real estate crisis in Florida in 1925 and the stock market crash of 1929."

Lips, Ferdinand. Gold Wars. New York, 2002, p. 22

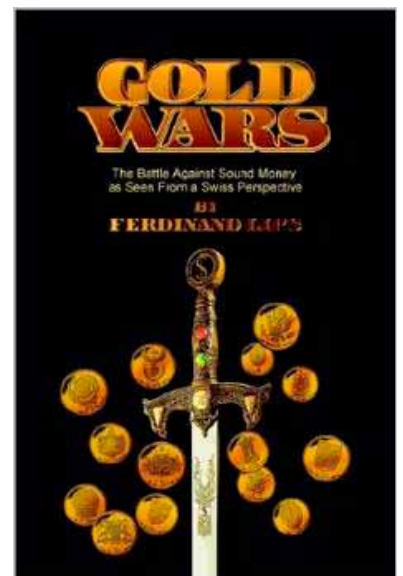
"Franklin Delano Roosevelt was elected in November 1932 when the economic world was prostrate. One can see how anyone with feeling for the little man would try to take direct action to help him. In that sense he cannot be blamed. Yet all the excesses derived from the inflation to pay for World War I, all the foolishness of the Federal Reserve Board had been liquidated violently, and FDR was presented with a clean slate. A really sound currency established at that time would almost certainly have prevented World War II and surely would have changed the economic history of the rest of this century."

Source: James Dines, The Invisible Crash (New York: Random House, 1977) as cited in Lips, Ferdinand, p. 23

"Ignoring gold led to the 1944 Bretton Woods system and also to its downfall. Without repeating the mistakes of 1914 or 1922, we never would have had an inflationary crisis in the 1970s. The oil crisis in the 70s and the approaching oil and energy crisis of the twenty-first century are primarily monetary crises. The suppression of gold and the unlimited expansion of fiat money have led to the monetary, economic and political crises and wars of the twentieth century. The end of Bretton Woods gave birth to the ongoing and future derivative crisis, which is at the base of what Alan Greenspan calls 'systemic risk'. Because the world disregarded gold money, the

world's crises were erroneously, but probably intentionally, blamed on gold. That is why we have gold wars. Financial markets can only function satisfactorily under a gold standard. History has shown that monetary stability was best under the automatism of the classic gold standard. Fiat money can only lead to short-lived financial and economic booms. The end result is inflation and embezzlement of savings at the expense of workers, pensioners and the poor, who are unable to defend themselves against the ongoing fraud."

Lips, Ferdinand. Gold Wars. The Battle Against Sound Money As Seen From A Swiss Perspective. New York, 2002, pp. 249/250



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“Share of gold in the SNB’s assets of 20% guarantees internal and external stability”

“We would be better advised to be dependent on gold than on the financial budgets of the EU!”

Interview with former judge of the Federal Administrative Court Hans-Jacob Heitz



Hans-Jacob Heitz
(picture ma)

Current Concerns: As it says itself, it is the duty of the Swiss National Bank (SNB) to guarantee price stability. Is this no longer possible with a 20 per cent gold backing?

Former judge of the Federal

Administrative Court Hans-Jacob Heitz:
On the contrary, because an adequate gold reserve to the extent of 1/5 of the SNB’s assets guarantees stability internally and externally.

Has the stability of the Swiss Franc nothing to do with the gold reserves?

A reasonable percentage of gold in respect to the assets quasi as an anchor is a guarantor for stability, because with this – furthermore increasingly scarce – precious metal you never suffer a total loss. It is no coincidence that in other States the trend is now towards a higher share of gold in the currency reserves, which is understood as a contribution to the stability of their own national currency.

According to the National Bank, the gold share per capita is higher in Switzerland than in Germany, France or even the US. To what extent are these figures arguments against a gold allocation increase?
The per capita comparison is absurd, because compared with countries that are 10 or 40 times larger the per capita allocation for Switzerland is easily even higher. We should in particular consider the actual numbers because in Germany the proportion of gold in the currency reserves is around 70%, similar to the US. Even the average for all EU countries is around 64%. In addition, there are efforts underway in Germany to bring home a part of the gold stored abroad, as is requested for Switzerland by the gold initiative.

The SNB says it has diversified its foreign exchange reserves reasonably. Do you share this opinion?

This (protective) assertion is doubtful, because the steady accumulation of euros – for the purpose of weakening the Swiss Franc – is increasingly becoming an actual cluster risk, which the SNB bosses like to deny. On the other hand, gold reserves, which would remain valuable, would not be such a risk. So, on closer observation, we cannot speak of a balanced diversification today.

Can liquidity not be held as flexible with a given gold standard, and to what extent would this be a problem for our currency and for our financial system? Are there ways to achieve a sufficient liquidity nonetheless?

As you know, with the precept of 1/5 gold quota 4/5 will remain, and within this scope there is sufficient room for liquidity and thus for flexibility. It would be an only slightly adjusted business model without fundamental consequences.

Would a gold backing of 20 percent reduce the profits and gains of the National Bank?

Like with any other precious metal, the price changes, and this affects the yield in a positive or negative sense. However, the fluctuations in the price of gold are predictable and affect the SNB results to only a moderate extent. If the distributions to the cantons turn out to be more modest in future – last year the SNB distributed nothing, although no given gold standard had been defined – this would be no disaster either, for this “subsidy” is problematic anyway. It is absurd that the President of the Conference of Finance Directors threatens pressure on tax increases on the score of a higher gold standard because the cantons are themselves responsible for their finances.

What effect might the approval of the initiative have on Switzerland as a business location?

The real economy will take a positive view, because it will make Switzerland be regarded as even safer and easier to predict. Citizens should not listen to the lament of the financial sector with its large trust deficit, which is on the rocks anyway!

What do you think about the provision that no gold is to be sold?

For the sake of completeness it should be noted that if any provision needs to be taken very seriously, then that of the selling ban, which has to be set in stone, although I am convinced in practise, even this will be gradually handled in a more pragmatic way. The price of gold will relativise the actual gold quota, and this will provide flexibility. A relative value would probably be better than a fixed number. Nevertheless, the future will show that it is unlikely that much will change over a longer period of time, yet more security would be guaranteed because in times of crisis the price of gold rises significantly, as it has done again since 2008. The current price of gold is completely irrelevant for assessing the gold initiative. The next crisis will come definitely and probably with even greater severity than we have been used to. Therefore, provision, which is the objective of the gold initiative, makes sense!

To what extent does SNB forfeit its independence by adopting a gold standard of 20%?

Speaking of the lament on the alleged limitation of independence, this is downright absurd because if we were to speak about dependence at all, we should do so in the context of the massive purchases of euros! We would be better advised to be dependent on gold than on the financial budgets of the EU!

Mr Heitz, thank you for your precise answers.

(Interview Thomas Kaiser)

“Appropriate gold holdings grant a high degree of independence to a state”

Interview with Gotthard Frick *



Gotthard Frick
(picture ma)

Current Concerns: Why is the gold backing of our currency not only an issue of fiscal policy but also one of security policy?

Appropriate gold holdings grant a state a high degree of independence to a state. Especially in a big crisis, such as

in a war, but not only then, gold is a very important means of payment or value behind printed money. This was particularly evident in World War II, when six billion gold and foreign exchange reserves were blocked or removed from our country, which was then an enormous amount. At that time, Switzerland had to pay for essential supply goods in gold. If you store the gold in your own country, no one else can take it away.

When and how did it happen that the gold was blocked?

On 21 June 1941, the US blocked the gold and currency reserves of all non-belliger-

ent European countries, i.e. also Switzerland, which were stored in their country. Switzerland was then very dependent on these reserves to pay for the imports we needed to survive. At the time we were in the so-called ‘battle for cultivation’, the establishment of the *Wahlen* plan, which was to reduce the 50% dependence on imports in food supplies. We had to import all fuels and raw materials, semi-finished products and many others from around the world. In this situation we were under a tremendous pressure of both warring parties. Each demanded that we should stop trading with their enemy, despite the neutrality law, which obliges the neutrals to treat all parties alike. But we really needed to be able to trade in order to preserve our economy, to safeguard jobs and to keep our people alive. By blocking the reserves stored in the United States, we were suddenly deprived of the access to a large part of the funds that we needed to finance our survival.

So what would we have to do today?

We should store a reasonable amount of gold somewhere in the country, of course not in Berne, but as decentralized as possible, e.g. in the mountains, in safe places, but in no case abroad.

Where do you see the parallels with the conditions at the war time?

The world today is – visible for everyone – in a very dangerous situation. Tensions rise everywhere. Many very prominent Europeans (*Jean-Claude Juncker, Helmut Schmidt, Egon Bahr*), have spoken of the possibility of war, even in Europe. We all hope that this will not happen. But threats to the security of gold and currency reserves also exist in the midst of peace. In recent times, we have also personally experienced that countries such as the United States used all their power ruthlessly to blackmail into acting according to American interests and adopting US laws and regulations.

What should be done?

First, we need a powerful and war-preventing army again which we do no longer have. Second, we must prepare ourselves economically so that we may get less easily blackmailed. It is probably clear to everyone that if we store the gold in the United States or in England and Canada, as seems to be the case at the moment, these states can always threaten us with a blockade to make us obey. Or, in case of a crisis or a war, ‘buy’ it without asking us, or

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“Gold reserves lend credence to a country and its currency”

In a federal referendum on 30 November, one of three main issues to be voted upon will be the popular initiative “Save our Swiss gold!” which proposes the introduction of a new article into the Federal Constitution:

“Art. 99a (new) Gold reserves of the Swiss National Bank

- 1 Gold reserves of the Swiss National Bank are not for sale.
- 2 Gold reserves of the Swiss National Bank are to be stored in Switzerland.
- 3 Swiss National Bank is to hold a substantial amount of its assets in gold. The percentage of gold must not undercut a minimum of 20%.”

[...]

Prompted by American pressure put on Switzerland in the negotiations concerning dormant Jewish World War II bank accounts in the 1990s, the National Bank Law was changed. The Swiss National Bank (SNB) subsequently sold 1,500 of the 2,500 tons of gold it possessed at the lowest gold exchange rate. A decision that robbed shareholders – two thirds of which were the Swiss cantons – of dozens of billions Swiss francs.

Apparently, the gold that was sold originated from the gold which the

SNB had stored with the American Federal Reserve (FED). According to the explanations given by the President of SNB, *Thomas Jordan* – which, regrettably, we are compelled to believe for the time being – 70% of the remaining 1,000 tons of gold are stored in Switzerland, while the Bank of England holds 20% and 10% remain with the National Bank of Canada. Nothing is left with the FED.

One has to ask how American authorities managed to convince Switzerland to sell its gold at the remarkably low share price in the first place. (To whom was it sold anyway?) Did they maybe suggest that Switzerland would eventually not be able to get back its gold from them at all? Or, worse, that the gold no longer existed in the FED’s vaults? The fact that recently, the US ultimately denied Germany’s request to transfer its 1,500 tons of gold which was as well stored in the FED’s depot, back to Germany, seems to legitimate these questions.

[...]
Gold reserves lend credence to a country and its currency. In case of a bigger crisis or a collapse of the financial system – which, in the face of a hellish spiral of “quantitative easing” and

other “unconventional monetary policy measures”, seems all but impossible – a gold standard would allow the Swiss franc to prevail. Alternatively, if the Swiss franc was to go down along with the euro to which it has been tied for the past three years, a new and more credible currency (because it would be backed by gold) could be introduced. Even under normal conditions, a currency that, in relation to the country’s size and the monetary mass emitted by its central bank, is backed by substantial amounts of gold reserves in otherwise similar conditions is more credible than a currency with less coverage.

[...]

In order to make good for the serious mistakes made 15 years ago and most importantly, in order to strengthen the Swiss franc in light of upcoming financial turmoil, we are voting in favour of the initiative “Save our Swiss Gold”.

Source: *La Nation* No 2004, 31.10.2014
by Denis Ramelet, Lausanne

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

“Appropriate gold holdings grant ...”

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seize it and say, we would get it back after the war. In times of a crisis it would be available to us no longer.

So gold has quite a crucial significance in times of crisis?

Yes, but there is another aspect. If we have enough gold, all our reserves are not only made of printed paper or magnetized particles in the electronic system. Since time immemorial gold has had a real value, although some deny this because you cannot eat gold.

I know Asia very well. All families are striving to have some gold there. The women in India and Pakistan are hung with gold. They see it as an asset, as an additional security. Of course, the value of gold fluctuates. Its ownership occasionally yields profits in accounting, there are occasional losses as well, however, which is much more true for foreign currencies. Switzerland's foreign exchange reserves are currently astronomically high. Depending on the further development, these stocks could cause enormous losses for Switzerland. This risk is many times greater than that which results from the price fluctuations of a limited 20% share of gold in the reserves of the National Bank.

Are the Asians buying the gold that we sell?

I know too little about the policies of the Asian central banks. But since the Chinese are allowed to do so, they buy gold on a large scale. It has also been mentioned that China might establish a large gold reserve in terms of the desired replacement of the dollar as a world currency. Whether that is true, I do not know.

The gold is seen as a guarantor against inflation. How important is it to cushion inflation?

Previously, gold was the standard of value. Suppose that the National Bank had a kilo

of gold, and it was established by law that 1 gram of gold equals the value of 35 Swiss francs. This also stipulates that the National Bank is permitted to print a maximum of 35,000 francs paper money with a kilo of gold. So you cannot print more money than the corresponding value of gold is that you are holding. This was the case in the times of gold backing ...

... and today?

Today the central banks, but also the European and US central bank can “print” money at random without any equivalent (while “printing” can also be an electronic process). For example, how did the Swiss National Bank finance the more than 500 billion francs in foreign currency, which it bought to support the exchange rate of 1.20 francs for 1 euro? The SNB “printed” this amount in Swiss francs.

About a year ago, the USA were near to insolvency, because it had reached the upper limit of public debt. Only when Congress adjusted the laws, the country was able to pay again – because it still could make more debt or saying it more concretely because it has been allowed to print more dollars since then.

What is more, – which probably many do not know – most money is created by the financial system, by the banks and not by the National Bank.

How would you describe this to a layman?

The system is easy to understand. If I pay 1,000 francs, which the National Bank has printed, into my savings account, it enables the bank to give any company a loan of about 900 francs. The company that receives the credit, will transfer the money to the bank account of a supplier in another bank. This bank then grants a credit of 810 francs to a third company and so on. This gives the system an enormous leverage. The 1,000 francs from the example, printed by the National Bank, have already become a total of 2,710 francs.

It is amazing that this has been practiced for so long.

This works, because experience shows that only a small part of the assets in the bank accounts are withdrawn in cash at any time. The banks use the rest for their transactions. But of course, the banks owe each saver the full amount in his account at any time. This is good as long as people trust the banks and the “value” printed on paper. But if they give rise to doubt, they will run to the banks all of them at the same time and demand to withdraw their money.

What do we have to expect then?

The banks have no longer got the money, then. In case of malfunctions of the system of money in any form, we always face very extreme developments, such as in 1923

with the hyperinflation in Germany, when one US dollar was “worth” 4,000 billion (!) Reichsmarks. Or banks are forbidden to open their counters, as was the case in Argentina at the beginning of the 21st century or recently for example in Cyprus. Today, the EU takes into consideration, to take away a portion of the account holders' assets to pay the debt when large banks collapse. This method has already been applied in Cyprus.

The combination of these two systems – unlimited printing of money by central banks and money creation by the financial system – has as a result that the “value” of the outstanding world money is expected to exceed the real value of all the goods on the planet earth many times over. We have a political movement that has in mind exactly this. It wants to make it impossible for the banks to create money.

If in case of acceptance of the gold initiative the National Bank will become obliged to keep 20% of their reserves in gold, this will contribute to the stability of the franc in the long term and create trust, even if the gold price falls and rises again later ...

... in the long term according to your descriptions gold reserves have benefits compared to valueless currency?

I recently spoke with one of the largest gold traders in the world. He said that the world gold stock was very small. If you put together all the gold, it would make a cube with a length of 40 meters. This is very little for the whole world. This scarcity of gold alone makes it valuable. The foreign exchange, hence bills, can be printed without limitation.

What conclusions can we draw from this?

Most people who no longer live in poverty, still keep a portion of their often modest assets in gold. This provides gold with a very great stability. Why should a state not do the same?

So you cannot accept the National Bank's accusation that gold was tainted with great risk?

As I said, the price of gold fluctuates. Its book value in the balance sheet of the National Bank may therefore rise or fall. Its fall can lead to a loss. But is only on paper, as well as a gain in a rising gold price. This is the reason why the gold initiative will also ban the sale of more than 20 per cent gold reserve. The gold is to serve exclusively the long-term stability and confidence. It is also to slightly reduce the extent to which money can be printed, since 20% of the additional money must be invested in gold.

Opponents of the initiative do of course not speak about the infinitely greater risk that the National Bank ran with holding

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Whom does the team in the federal parliament building serve?

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

Strange voices could be heard in the Swiss political and media landscape in recent years claiming that more and more popular initiatives were “contrary to international law”, and even that too many initiatives were being submitted. Therefore, the right to initiative should be restricted. The proposals of the Federal Council to make the initiative texts subject to a substantive preliminary review by the Federal Administration or to extend the invalidity of submitted initiatives have already been clearly rejected in the consultation process.¹ This shows that the majority of the cantonal governments and the responding parties and associations luckily remain steadfast towards any assault on direct democracy, whenever it matters.

The recent attack on our people’s rights comes from *Annemarie Huber-Hotz*. The lady is not just anyone: She was Federal Chancellor from 2000 to 2007. The role of the Swiss Federal Chancellor is similar to that of a local clerk at the community level: He supports and advises the executive members and participates in their meetings; he often has the best overview of the business. Thus, the Chancellor holds the important office of Chief of Staff of the Federal Council, therefore he is often called the “eighth Federal Councillor”.

Now what is the former Chancellor Annemarie Huber-Hotz’s message to the public? In the daily press the lady makes her opinion known, as to which community groups are likely to continue to use the right to initiative and which are not. The people’s initiative was not introduced for “the parties’ acquisition of a clear profile”, but for minorities without a voice in government and parliament. (Source: “*Neue Luzerner Zeitung*” of 5 November 2014) Today, an “excessive use of popular rights” was taking place, so the major political parties should be banned from submitting an initiative.

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huge foreign exchange reserves; however, I would like to say that they probably had no other choice with the current legal requirements and other prerequisites. The gold-initiative wants to change that.

According to what you explained you will certainly vote for the adoption of the gold initiative?

I already mailed my “yes”.

Mr Frick, thank you for your explanations.

Amazing words from the mouth of a former Swiss chief officer of whom the citizens might actually expect that she would back up the citizens’ democratic rights and be familiar with the basic principles of the rule of law. The claim that the right to initiative was introduced for one or the other type of Swiss people is pretty thick. The right to initiative has been codified in the Federal Constitution since 1891 and it was adopted in a referendum. As a matter of course, it equally applies to all Swiss voters.

An initiative ban on certain groups of citizens would really be a clear case to be taken to the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), but also to the Swiss Federal Court. If that is not assessed to violate equal rights, the heads of state and human rights experts can retire. “Every person is equal before the law”, is determined by *Article 8, paragraph 1 of the Federal Constitution*. This also applies to those citizens who are members of a political party.

The *Director of the Federal Office of Justice (FOJ), Martin Dumermuth*, does not want to go as far as A. Huber-Hotz. He wrote the memorable words: “*Politically powerful groups, which are represented in parliament, use the right to initiative as a means of mobilizing.*” To this end, initiatives were formulated more pointedly and adopted more frequently – and therefore were more difficult to implement. (Source: “*Neue Luzerner Zeitung*” of 5 November 2014)

Such statements of present and former chief officers make us wonder: Of course, the political parties, as well as organizations such as labor unions and consumer or environmental organizations use the right to initiative or referendum – besides the factual concerns that must not be denied the supporting citizens! – for “the acquisition of a clear profile” and for “mobilization”. This is part of everyday politics and has already been so a hundred years ago. The fact that some of the latest federal popular initiatives, such as the Deportation Initiative, the Custodial or Mass Immigration Initiatives, were “difficult to implement”, as the director of FOJ says, is part of the executive’s work: the Federal Council and Federal Administration have the constitutional mandate to implement the people’s will, whether this is difficult or not. The implementation may be associated with the termination and renegotiation of agreements between Switzerland and other countries, which is certainly not easy. But as I said, it is part of a highly-paid Federal Councillor’s job or the job of the Director of a Federal Office.

A word on Mrs Huber-Hotz’ faux pas. Her anger is understandable: In recent years, a surprising number of federal popular ini-

atives were adopted by the sovereign; partly those which had been launched by major parties, but also for example the “Abzocker Initiative” (racketeering initiative) which was actually launched by a single citizen. In contrast, the party of which the lady is a member, has never launched a federal popular initiative, as far as I know. One attempt in recent times, in which they were directly democratically active for once, failed miserably: the initiative “Stop Bureaucracy”, handed in in April 2012 with the very scarce amount of 100,649 signatures, was declared “not accomplished” on 2 August 2012 by the present Federal Chancellor *Corina Casanova* because only 97,537 valid signatures had been handed in.

Since the ones are incapable of getting something done, the others should pay dearly? •

¹ Measures to improve the compatibility of International Law and National Law (Amendment to the Federal Constitution and the Federal Law on Political Rights): (...) Report on the results of the consultation. November 2013; cf. “People’s Rights Must not Be Levered out” in *Current Concerns* No 20 from 2 October 2011

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China and the inconsistent geostrategic behavior of the US

by David P. Goldman*

Everything in tragedy happens for a reason, and the result always is sad; most things in comedy happen by accident and the outcome typically is happy. Sino-American relations are not destined for conflict, although that is possible. The misunderstandings that bedevil relations between the world's two most powerful countries remain comedic rather than tragic. That probably is as good as it gets, for no amount of explanation will enable Chinese and Americans to make sense of each other.

Where the Chinese are defensive and cautious, the Americans tend to perceive them as aggressive; where the Chinese are expansive ambitious, the Americans ignore them altogether. The United States is a Pacific power accustomed to maritime dominance. To the extent that Americans focus on China's foreign policy, it is to express alarm at China's territorial claims on small uninhabited islands also claimed by Japan, Vietnam and the Philippines. Apart from some overheated and self-serving rhetoric from a few Chinese military leaders, though, the contested islands are of negligible importance in China's scale of priorities.

The issue may be moot by this writing: last week, China and Japan released a "Principled Agreement on Handling and Improving Bilateral Relations", following meetings between Japan's national security adviser, *Shotaro Yachi*, and Chinese State Councillor *Yang Jiechi*. The document promises to "establish crisis management mechanisms to avoid contingencies" and to employ "dialogue and consultation".

Neither Japan nor China had any interest in a military confrontation in the Pacific, although both sides employed the island disputes to play to their own nationalist constituencies. The Principled Agree-

ment sends a signal that the Kabuki show had gone far enough.

A common American meme in response to supposed Chinese expansionism in the Pacific projected an Indian-Japanese military alliance to contain Chinese ambitions under US sponsorship. Although a few Indian nationalists enthused over the idea, it was an empty gesture from the outside. If India got into a scrap with China over disputed borders, for example, just what would Japan do to help?

The newly-elected Indian government under *Narendra Modi* never took the idea seriously. On the contrary, after President *Xi Jinping's* recent state visit to India, Modi envisions Chinese investment in urgently needed infrastructure. Economics trumps petty concerns over borders in the mountainous wasteland that separates the world's two most populous nations.

There also is a strategic dimension to the growing sense of agreement between China and India. From India's vantage point, China's support for Pakistan's army is a concern, but it cuts both ways. Pakistan remains at perpetual risk of tipping over towards militant Islam, and the main guarantor of its stability is the army. China wants to strengthen the army as a bulwark against the Islamic radicals, who threaten China's Xinjiang province as much as they do India, and that probably serves India's interests as well as any Chinese policy might.

Chinese analysts are dumbfounded about the US response to what they view as a sideshow in the South China Sea and only tangentially concerned about India. They struggle to understand why a vastly improved relationship with Russia has emerged in response to US blundering in Ukraine.

As a matter of diplomatic principle, China does not like separatists because it has its own separatists to contend with, starting with the Muslim Uyghurs in Xinjiang province. Washington thought that the Maidan Revolution in Kiev last year would take Crimea out of Russian control, and Russia responded by annexing the peninsula containing its main warm-water naval base.

When the West imposed sanctions on Russia in retaliation, Moscow moved eastwards – an obvious response, and one that strongly impacts Western power. Not only has Russia opened its gas reserve to China, but it has agreed to supply China with its most sophisticated military technology, including the formidable S-400 air defense system. Russia was reluctant to do

so in the past given Chinese efforts to reverse-engineer Russian systems, but the Ukraine crisis changed that.

Western analysts, to be sure, now observe that the new Russian-Chinese rapprochement might be a challenge for the West. The *New York Times* devoted a front-page feature to the opinions of the usual suspects among Soviet watchers in its November 9 edition.

This was obvious months ago, and should have been obvious before the fact: the West merely threw B'r'er Putin into the briar patch to his east. Of all the miscalculations in Western policy since World War II, this was perhaps the stupidest. The Chinese are left to scratch their heads about their unanticipated good luck.

It is wrong to speak of a Russian-Chinese alliance, to be sure, but there is a developing Sino-Russian condominium in Asia. The energy and defense deals between Moscow and Beijing are important in their own right, but they take on all the more importance in the context of what might be the most ambitious economic project in history: the New Silk Road. The Pacific holds little promise for China. Japan and South Korea are mature economies, customers as well as competitors of China.

Expansion in the Pacific simply has nothing to offer China's economy. What China wants is to be impregnable within its own borders: it will spend generously to develop surface-to-ship missiles that can take out US aircraft carriers, hunter-killer submarines, and air defense systems.

China's prospects are to the west and south: energy and minerals in Central Asia, food in Southeast Asia, warm-water ports on the Indian Ocean, a vast market, and access to world markets beyond. The network of rail, pipelines and telecommunications that China is building through the former Soviet republics and through Russia itself will terminate at the Mediterranean and provide a springboard for Chinese trade with Europe.

The whole Eurasian landmass is likely to become a Chinese economic zone, especially now that Russia is more amenable to Chinese terms. That the Americans would have helped bring this to fruition by tilting at windmills in Ukraine baffles the Chinese, but they are enjoying the result.

The economic impact of this is hard to fathom, but it is likely to extend Chinese influence westwards on a scale that

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the West simply hasn't begun to imagine. It is not at all clear whether China has a clear idea of what the implications of the New Silk Road might be. The implosion of America's geopolitical position has placed risks and opportunities at Beijing's doorstep, to Beijing's great surprise.

A year ago, Chinese officials privately reassured visitors that their country would "follow the lead of the dominant superpower" in matters relating to Middle East security, including Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons. For the past several decades, China has allowed the US to look out for the Persian Gulf while it increased its dependency on Persian Gulf oil. By 2020, China expects to import 70% of its oil, and most of that will come from the Gulf.

The Chinese view has changed radically during the past few months, in part due to the collapse of the Syrian and Iraqi states and the rise of Islamic State. It is hard to find a Chinese specialist who still thinks that the US can stand surely for Persian Gulf security. Opinion is divided between those who think that America is merely incompetent and those who think that America deliberately wants to destabilize the Persian Gulf.

Now that the US is approaching self-sufficiency in energy resources, some senior Chinese analysts believe it wants to push the region into chaos in order to hurt China. One prominent Chinese analyst pointed out that Islamic State is led by Sunni officers trained by the United States during the 2007–2008 "surge" as well as elements of *Saddam Hussein's* old army, and that this explains why IS has displayed such military and organizational competence.

The complaint is justified, to be sure: General *David Petraeus* helped train the 100,000-strong "Sunni Awakening" to create a balance of power against the

Shi'ite majority regime that the US helped bring to power in 2006. How, the Chinese ask, could the *Bush* administration and *Petraeus* have been so stupid? To persuade the Chinese that they were indeed that stupid is a daunting task.

China's attitude towards Washington has turned towards open contempt. Writing of the mid-term elections, the official daily newspaper "Global Times" intoned: "The lame-duck president will be further crippled? He has done an insipid job, offering nearly nothing to his supporters. US society has grown tired of his banality."

But the decline of American influence in the region from which China obtains most of its oil is not a happy event for Beijing.

China did not anticipate the end of the free ride from the Americans, and it isn't sure what to do next. It has tried to maintain a balance among countries with whom it trades and who are hostile to each other. It has sold a great deal of conventional weapons to Iran, for example, and some older, less-sophisticated ballistic missiles.

But China has sold Saudi Arabia its top-of-the-line intermediate range missiles, giving the Saudis a "formidable deterrent capability" against Iran and other prospective adversaries. China obtains more oil from Saudi Arabia than any other country, although its imports from Iraq and Oman are growing faster. Because the latter two countries are closer to Iran, China wants to strike a balance.

Chinese opinion is divided about the implications of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons: some strategists believe that the balance of nuclear power in the region will suffice to prevent the use of such weapons, while others fear that a nuclear exchange in the Gulf might stop the flow of oil and bring down China's economy. China has joined the P-5 plus 1 negotiations (involving the UN Security Council permanent five members plus Germany) on Iran's nu-

clear status, but has not offered a policy independent of President *Barack Obama's*.

Meanwhile the rise of Islamist extremism worries Beijing, as well it should. At least a hundred Uyghurs reportedly are fighting with Islamic State, presumably in order to acquire terrorist skills to bring back home to China. Chinese analysts have a very low opinion of the Obama administration's approach to dealing with IS, but do not have an alternative policy. This is an issue of growing importance. Instability threatens the Silk Road project at several key notes.

China has no sympathy whatever for what analysts there like to call "political Islam". America's flirtation with the Muslim Brotherhood – both from the Obama administration and from mainstream Republicans such as Senator *John McCain* – strikes the Chinese as incompetence, or worse. But China has no capability to go after the Islamists, except for a very limited deployment of marines off the coast of Somalia.

China's policy-making is careful, conservative and consensus-driven. Its overriding concern is its own economy. The pace of transformation of the Middle East has surprised it, and it is trying to decide what to do next.

Its pro forma policy is to join the Iran talks, and offer to join the Quartet (the UN, the US, the European Union, and Russia) talks on the Israel-Palestine issue, but neither of these initiatives has much to do with its actual concerns.

What China will do in the future cannot be predicted. But it seems inevitable that China's basic interests will lead it to far greater involvement in the region, all the more so as the US withdraws. •

¹ According to the meme theory a meme is an idea that spreads from person to person within a culture by communication.

Source: *Asia Times Online* from 10 November 2014; www.atimes.com/atimes/china/CHIN-02-101114.html;

NATO desperately longs for Russian invasion into Eastern Ukraine

by Willy Wimmer, former Secretary of State in the German Federal Ministry of Defence



Willy Wimmer
(picture ma)

In these days it is conspicuous to which extent the German state media lag behind. The evening opinion hammering is as pastoral-obtrusive as ever – they do not know where to put their feet in the studio in

face of so much political correctness. If you look outside your own country, it is common knowledge: Either we succeed in meliorating the regional conflicts during the nuclear negotiations with Iran – entering the final phase between 18 and 24 November –, or we must – through no fault of our own – come to terms with looking at the fuse smouldering for the next major global conflict.

And yet there are developments that are closer to us and things that seem to keep the conflict a few flying hours away “off our backs”. Even the meeting of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation in the Chinese capital Beijing has clearly shown that not much is missing.

Either prudence and awe in view of the misery that is to be expected take a chance or things will mature to be fought to the bitter end. For decades, the world has not seen such a situation as it is in store for us at the end of 2014.

We in Europe and what is counted among the “West” should not forget our moral, economic, fiscal and general political situation at the end of the Cold War and the reunification of Germany. And today? Rarely was a situation squandered to such an extent, as we must realize it today, that would have allowed us to take effective action against the misery in the world. Only by its own fault did the West throw overboard a brilliant starting point for whatever challenge. Why? Because we are – for many reasons – allied with a power that, for more than a decade, has “thrashed about” in the true sense of the

word and has suspended all the rules that would have given us a chance of a more peaceful world. We were following behind. Today, we can only pray that the conflict in Eastern Ukraine does not ruin more than our next Christmas.

It was just unrewarding that the Russian Federation had become a “feather in the wind” at the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union and thus had been absent as a co-anchor of European stability for a long time. Those in Moscow and we in Bonn or Berlin had to look on as Washington did away with everything that hindered their path. The West – and we among them – has not gained anything constructive from a successfully passed-through confrontation in a major global region. Now what? Now it actually takes our breath away that the Russian Federation is back on the world stage again, after having experienced the American way with its illegal wars against Belgrade, Baghdad, Damascus and Tripoli as painful and as directed against them.

Today, there is every indication that the US-dominated West cannot come to terms with either Russia’s voicelessness nor with the return of the Russian Federation as a globally operating power. The European Union is getting in line, of course, as already demonstrated by the new High Representative for Foreign Affairs of the EU-Commission which was intentionally shaken into crisis by Washington via its president *Juncker*.

Even in her first public statement Ms *Mogherini* made it clear that the future policy towards Moscow would be closely adjusted to that of NATO which means that we will have very little say, while at the other hand we are bearing the main burden of the enforced sanctions.

Ms *Mogherini* does not conceal her opinion that the sanctions which were forced on us by Washington will have no impact at all on the Russian leadership. Yes indeed, why do we have these sanctions at all and why were they decided upon, anyway?

Neither does the West pass with its deceptive image of the sanctions as

it had put it on stage before the astonished and increasingly concerned public. Did they want to evoke the impression that by exerting their influence on Kiev and Moscow the West had taken measures to stabilize the situation? Not at all! For everybody on this globe knows well enough that those sanctions represented a biased operation towards Moscow in line with the West’s course of action in Kiev. Using a military concept, the sanctions can be compared to some additional tank divisions which serve at securing one’s own offensive against a peaceful country, in this case the Russian Federation.

Not even the published telephone conversations of the US Secretary of State Ms *Nuland* were necessary to understand the general western strategy in Ukraine. The West did not find fault with President *Janukovitch* and the oligarch-festival in Ukraine as long as he seemed ready to sign the respective contracts with the European Union. New and old EU-commissioners made it clear during the past weeks, how very faulty the European policy has been in this context. Just blunder, where ever you look.

In the very night after the Maidan killings the firebrands that had been synchronized with the western instigators were hurled into those regions of Ukraine, which the West had planned in order to be able to take action against Russia. Neither did one shy away from using such forces that have the impact of a middle-aged pestilence, namely old and new Nazis. It is as surprising as it is shameful who those people are in Kiev and in Germany who keep silent about this fact or play down the use of military formations of that ideological background right on the Russian border. You would not believe if you knew who is a party in this silence.

Our governments, however, should know about one thing: Whoever believes them or the media which are influenced by them anything at all with respect to the continuous reporting from this conflict area in East Ukraine, cannot be helped. •

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

HarmoS and Curriculum 21: Not with our children!

Popular initiatives in several cantons

by Dr iur Marianne Wüthrich

Everywhere in the country, parents, teachers and other citizens are combining forces against Curriculum 21. A group of parents has created an informative and impressive newsletter, positioning themselves against Curriculum 21 – a concoction which contradicts any idea of education – and demanding a good school education for their children instead. (www.elternfuereinegutevolksschule.ch/).

Various popular initiatives are under way so that the citizens will be able to decide for themselves what kind of school and curriculum they want for their children. In the Canton Basel-country, two initiatives for a withdrawal from HarmoS¹ and for a good teachers' education have been submitted; in the cantons of Aargau and Schwyz the collection of votes for a rejection of Curriculum 21 is under way. In the country of St Gallen votes are being collected for a withdrawal from HarmoS. In several other cantons the launch of popular initiatives is imminent.

In several cantons, the ministers of education have obviously come under considerable pressure due to this legitimate usage of direct democratic means – obviously they have become used to deciding the fundamental questions of primary education according to their taste in their exclusive bodies behind closed doors, e.g. the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK)² meetings, without asking the voters. Now they are called to order by the sovereign.

Cantons that joined the HarmoS Concordat in the past, must implement Curriculum 21 – the EDK stubbornly repeated until recently. Now when in more and more cantons the people have taken the issue into their own hands, the cantons' ministers of education fear for their agenda. They are backing off, all of a sudden declaring the opposite – in order to rescue HarmoS or Curriculum 21 or both?

The cantons do not have to implement Curriculum 21 – the EDK has been entrapped in its own contradictions

Suddenly, the EDK general secretary Hans Ambühl declares to the press: "The Concordat is not stipulating any curricula for the language regions, but a harmonization of curricula within a language region. Every canton in German speaking Switzerland can decide whether and how it wants to implement Curriculum 21." ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 22 October 2014) The minister of education of St Gallen, Stefan Kölliker, under pressure by

two popular initiatives, is taking the bull by the horns. Asked by a journalist whether he was going to implement Curriculum 21 also in case the just-started popular initiative aiming at a withdrawal from HarmoS proved successful, he surprisingly responded: "Yes. First, because there is no connection between HarmoS and Curriculum 21. [...]" (St. Galler Tagblatt online, 25 October 2014)

This is a real surprise: Has the EDK been telling lies so far? Or have the "education experts", under pressure by the popular initiatives, read the HarmoS Concordat – which they themselves created – for the first time and "discovered" that it does nowhere decree that the cantons have to implement any curriculum?³ (cf. Art. 12) Anyway – the EDK's credibility is once more suffering from this meandering course.⁴

The "Administrative Agreement on the Implementation of a Launch Project for a Curriculum for the Language Regions (project agreement Curriculum 21)", dated 18 March 2010, which has been cited as a "legal base" for Curriculum 21, is an agreement between the cantons' governing councils. Of course it does not bind the legislative (cantonal parliaments and sovereign) in any way.

Assent to HarmoS under false pretenses

In those cantons where the populations approved the HarmoS Concordat some years ago, the decision was based on the false promise that harmonization would make it easier for children to catch up with their new school's learning objectives in case the family moved from one canton to another. Before the votes, the cantonal governments also asserted that HarmoS only harmonized a few essential points which were stipulated by Article 62, paragraph 4 of the Federal Constitution. Thus the Canton of Zurich's official communication for the vote of 30 November 2008 stated: "The central point of the HarmoS Concordat is the harmonization of the school entry age, of compulsory education, the length and the main steps of the school years. The new constitutional articles on education which have been accepted by the people and the cantons on 21 May 2006, are obliging the cantons to take this step. The Zurich elementary school law of 7 February 2005 is meeting the requirements of the concordat in all points. The only legal change that will be necessary in the Canton of Zurich with acceding to the HarmoS Concordat is moving up the school entry age by three months." (Official communication of the Canton of Zurich for the vote, page 10)

In other words: in the Canton of Zurich – as in the other cantons – nearly all guide-

New edition of Curriculum 21 – same difference

On 7 November the Swiss German Board of Education presented a "slimmed down" version of the Curriculum 21 to the public. Now this version comprises less pages and "competencies", however, the basic fundamental policy criticised by the opponents has not changed. In fact, merely "deletions of content, the removal of overlaps and a summarising of competencies [...]" were carried out. In the media let-outs one reads with astonishment that although in certain areas the demands have supposedly been lowered, but: "In the faculties of German, foreign languages, mathematics and natural sciences, the basic requirements still correspond to the Swiss-wide prevailing basic competencies (national educational standards)." Which "national educational standards"? Did we miss anything? That pupils after nine years of schooling are able to read, write and calculate, cannot apparently be meant if one reads through the educational Curriculum 21 – in the shortened version, neither.

It is up to us citizens to insist on a curriculum in primary school that enables our children to later participate in professional life and in society.

lines according to BV (Federal Constitution) Article 62 Paragraph 4 have been fulfilled even before joining HarmoS. Just the "most important objectives of the school years" would have to be adjusted by the cantons. For this you would neither need HarmoS or a conference of ministers, but a team of experienced teachers of all years who sit together, compare the most important objectives at every school year in the various cantons and adjust them – if desired.

A lesson in civic education

On the position of the sovereign in direct democracy: In direct democratic Switzerland, it is still the sovereign that represents the highest year of the hierarchy – also in the cantons – just as a reminder, in case it has slipped from the mind of some canton executive.

On federalism: In spite of all aspiration for harmonization, the fundamental article of the Federal Constitution on the school sector is still valid always confirmed by the cantonal ministers of education themselves: BV Article 62, Paragraph 1: "Public education is the responsibility of the cantons". "The cantons" – that means the education directors merely as servants to the people.

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"HarmoS and Curriculum 21..."

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Importance of concordats: In Swiss federalism we see *concordats* not as means of country-wide solutions but exclusively as optional agreements between two or more cantons. Bodies like the EDK, consisting of the ministers of education of the various cantons, who impose so-called "concordats" top-down on the cantons, have no democratic legitimation whatsoever and are profoundly un-Swiss.⁵

Direct democratic instruments against the rule of the executives: Fortunately, the latter is meeting with fierce resistance from the citizens who are fighting back with popular initiatives and referenda. This is why the nation-wide introduction of the concordat failed: It was rejected in referenda or in popular votes in ten cantons or the administrations did not want to introduce it. Other cantons could also follow this path.

The "most important objectives of the school grades": On the interpretation of BV Article 62, Paragraph 4⁶

One of the cantonal ministers of education said to the press that criticism of Curriculum 21 was partially "abstruse", and "demonizing" its competency orientation. Statements like this demonstrate that he who utters them, does not have a deep knowledge of the matter – but he definitely has acquired one of the "competencies" of Curriculum 21: that is the readiness to "reflect" on an issue without profound factual knowledge.

Current Concerns has investigated the Curriculum 21 in detail in numerous articles.

In the 2006 Swiss vote on the education articles the Swiss citizens have also approved a harmonization of the "most important objectives of the school years".

When they hear this expression, most voters probably imagine that, for example, children can add and subtract up to 20 at the end of the first grade, or that they learn the multiplication tables in the second grade. It is obvious that only this kind of objectives is relevant in case a family moves from one canton to another. Objectives that only stipulate that children should somehow, within three or four grades, find out about the multiplication table, are of no use here.

Instead of setting such clear and – for all parents and teachers – plausible objectives, the selected "education experts" of the EDK, in their secret chambers, have far exceeded the limits of the constitution. The EDK general secretary Ambühl comments the very widely formulated BV Article 62 in the following way: "How we interpret the Constitution's mandate is up to our political discretion" ("Neue Zürcher Zeitung" from 22 October 2014). It should be clear: a certain margin of discretion that was left open on purpose does not grant the execu-

Mathias Binswanger: "Learning is not always a pleasure, and sometimes it is even hard."

mw. In the following an expert for education shall have the chance to speak who has not been consulted to by the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK) – next to a number of other important persons.

"Isn't the acquisition of competencies more important than 'reciting' facts and data?"

Binswanger: Nobody requests to just cram students full with knowledge at school. But without any basic knowledge a student cannot be competent either, nor judicious. It is useful for a student to know the multiplication tables by heart, it is useful for him to know when the First and the Second World War took place. If you want to make yourself understood in a foreign language, you have to learn the vocabulary. Finally, during a conversation you cannot constantly look at your iPhone for translation. Learning is not always a pleasure, and sometimes it is even hard. Often you have to learn things that do not interest you at first. It is not sufficient to have competences, to be able to google some things on the Internet.

The development of Curriculum 21 has cost millions. Should we not stop the whole exercise?

Binswanger: At any rate, scaling down the curriculum by 20%, as the EDK did, after all the criticism was submitted in the course of the consultation process, is not sufficient. A curriculum is not supposed to be a monumental work that prescribes recipes for the teaching like a cooking book. A curriculum should be slim and should contain some precisely formulated principles. It was neglected to take in a large professional basis of teachers to develop it. The majority did not know what was being contrived behind closed doors. I would call the exercise off. It does not make sense to implement something bad just because it has cost a lot."

Source: "Die Lehrer fühlen sich als Degen" (Teachers feel like idiots), Neue Luzerner Zeitung from 18.10.2014 – Mathias Binswanger is a professor for national economy at the University of Applied Sciences of North-Western Switzerland and an associate professor at the University of St.Gallen.

utive authorities the right to proceed along their one-sided ideologies. Instead they have to adhere to the general understanding of what learning objectives are in Switzerland. Of course, the Federal Constitution does not bind the cantons to introduce the "EDK basic competences" – if this is a short form for the more than 4,000 competences of the Curriculum 21. By the way, it also does not prescribe languages in primary schools. But those who think that the 550 page volume which is a bit thinner now, does make a real difference, are definitely wrong: It has neither removed the ideological orientation nor has it added meaningful learning content. But our children have the right to an education which prepares them well for their future life and their life tasks

in the family, as citizens and in their professions.

- ¹ Inter-canton agreement on the harmonization of compulsory school (HarmoS concordat), 14 June 2006, effective since 1 August 2009.
- ² Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education
- ³ Cf. Article 12 of the HarmoS Concordat on implementation. The curriculum is not mentioned there.
- ⁴ Cf. *Current Concerns* No 31/32 from 31 October 2013.
- ⁵ Cf. "conference of canton governments (KdK) – rule of executives instead of federalism and democracy", *Current Concerns* No 34, from 5 November 2013
- ⁶ "If the coordination is not able to obtain a harmonization of the school system in the areas of the harmonization of the school entry age, the compulsory education, the length and the main steps of the school years and their transitions and the acknowledgement of qualifications, the federal state issues the necessary regulations." Remark: To allow the federal state to take over, according to the constitution at least 18 cantons would have had to join the HarmoS concordat. But only 15 did.

Konrad Paul Liessmann: Historically the concept of competencies is not rooted in pedagogy or educational theory but in economics**Education versus ...**

"But, even though the education experts' hearts may ache, the sense of the modern school was and is – in addition to the economic necessities that led to literacy programs – to bundle, to systematize and to communicate the key cognitions and results of several thousands of years of human endeavor to acquire knowledge, in order to first create that very basis, on which the creativity and originality, which everybody is raving about, can develop. To give young people much time to reinvent the wheel once more, may sound well but in reality their lifetime is being stolen."

... competence orientation

"Historically the concept of competence is not rooted in pedagogy or educational theory but in economics, more precisely in the effort to make work performances measurable, comparable and thus more optimized."

Source: Konrad Paul Liessmann, Geisterstunde. Die Praxis der Unbildung. Eine Streitschrift. Vienna 2014, p. 40 and pp. 45; ISBN 978-3-552-05700-5; The author is Professor at the Institute of Philosophy of the University of Vienna

Ghost drivers in the Education Department

Curriculum 21 – with full throttle on the opposing traffic lane

rl. The draft curriculum for elementary schools for all of Switzerland that is based on so-called “competences”, “Curriculum 21” – briefly called LP 21 – turned out to be such a lousy job that it failed miserably. Even in the pre-fabricated answers to the legislative consultation process (Vernehmlassung) there is abundant criticism is to be heard. Much like wrong-way drivers, the promoters of the curriculum, notably the chairman of the Swiss Conference of Cantonal Ministers of Education (EDK-D), are however firmly convinced that the oncoming cars are driving in the wrong direction. Friendly wake-up calls, flash signals pass unheeded, just as the factual explanations that a curriculum with over 4,000 competences to be achieved by the students and afterwards also to be controlled, is good at best for a bloated bureaucracy, but not for a living school. The gaze fixed, the pressure on the gas pedal unabated firm! Where does he want to go together with his EDK-co-drivers on the educational highway? Some of the fellow passengers have postponed the cantonal introduction by one up to four years. Maybe then everyone would have forgotten what was served up...?

In the meantime, however, money is already diligently spent in the cantons on the introduction of the curriculum. Educational bureaucracies are spinning with all this activity: Millions for multipliers,

project management, programs, events, training, etc. “Experts” and “evaluation” have to be paid for, too. True to the principle, that the numerous “wrong-way drivers” coming towards me in the opposite direction, will finally get out of my way, if I only press the gas pedal hard enough.

And finally, all the newly to be acquired teaching aids. Educational publishers – increasingly also from the nearby EU countries – are already queuing up in front of the cantonal teaching aids centers: Schroedel, Cornelsen or Klett, all sorts of software and hardware companies – millions are laughing, millions are winking, millions of tax payers’ francs.

Interestingly, similar curricula are appearing, as if by magic, under other names in various European educational bureaucracies. Obviously, they are no local elaborates. Wrong-way drivers there too – but they can drive more smoothly, because the people have less say there .

Where does the idea of introducing feckless curricula for all students come

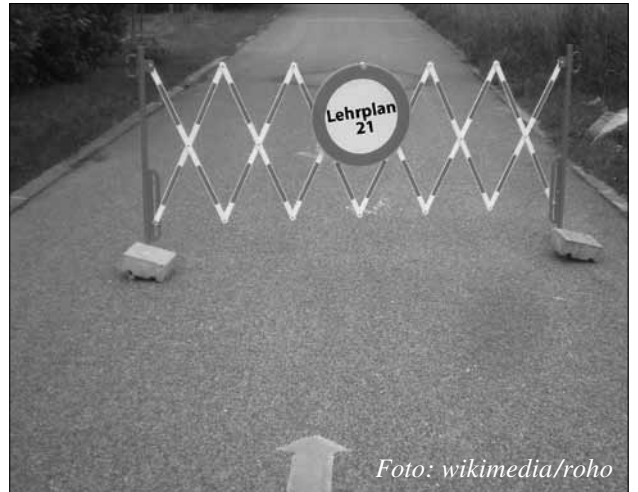


Foto: wikimedia/roho

from? From the OECD? Or from an EU “round table”? Who elected them in order to create laws and curricula for our students? Do wrong-way drivers actually receive a special “hazard bonus”?

It is time for the police barrier. The wrong-way driver and his copilots are prudently, but unmistakably to be wigwagged to the side and brought to a detailed verification of their driving ability. The other road users may then safely pursue their work.

Source: 2014/Die allgemeinen Wetternachrichten

(Translation Current Concerns)

Luzi's foster mother died

She raised a polar bear at Basel Zoo – 44 years prior to Knut in Berlin

by Heini Hofmann*

One is reminded of the huge 2007 media fuss around the bottle-fed baby polar bear Knut in the Berlin Zoo. However, already 44 years before the Basel Zoo had had its breeding premiere with the polar bear Luzi! His foster mother had now deceased at the age of 91.

When in 1963, after several unsuccessful natural breedings bear keeper Hans Schenk realized that the Basel polar bear Dadiana had given birth to two cubs again and did not accept them it was decided to try hand breeding. While the female pup died after a few days its brother survived. As Luzi it was to become the zoo's darling and media star.

A round the clock job

The technical director of the Zoological Gardens Basel at the time Paul Steinemann and his wife Zita took over. In the



The French bulldog “Bichette” – a touching dedicated playfellow (picture P. Steinemann)

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Isn't that cute? – Appealing childlike characteristics

hh. Once the cute and thus tame bottle-animal-cubs were the PR-sensation and box-office hit of zoological gardens. Some even reached worldwide fame like the European firstborn and man-reared Basel gorilla-girl *Goma*. Today the view has changed. Since such animals fed by the bottle and oriented towards human beings are nearly impossible to reintegrate into the group. This is the reason why in most cases today nature is to decide which animal survives. The exception – so endangered or difficult to rear species like polar bears – proofs the rule.

Unfortunately it shows to an alarming extend that like in the cases of polar bear-bottle-child *Knut*, *Flocke* in Nürnberg and *Siku* in Denmark we humans are alienated from nature so that the cuteness and childlike characteristics which such a small cuddle-Knut embodies appeal to us very much.

The worldwide press outdid each other with superlatives, the number of visitors in the Berlin Zoo exploded and copycat marketing flourished. Finally *Knut* even became a flagship in the fight against climate-change. The end sometimes justifies the means. Bottle-animals in a zoological garden are an ambivalent issue in which sentimentality and marketing compete. In Switzerland this is no longer an issue, because



What Knut, Flocke and Siku have been today, was Luzi at that time: the darling of the public. (picture P. Steinemann)

the zoos in Basel and Zurich have decided to dispense with polar bear husbandry.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

"Luzi's foster mother died"

continued from page 14

night. After he moved along only crawling at first, he could on the 40th day stand on his feet for the first time. On day 82, he was able to stand upright on his hind-legs "bear" style. From then on the predator attitudes developed. Teeth and claws left their marks on hands and furniture so that Steinmann's furnishings went through hard times ...

Berlin asked for advice

When Luzi became too strong and walking with him on the zoo grounds was too dangerous, he had to be constrained to the predator house at night and later entirely. Since a bottle-fed animal that is fixated on humans can hardly be reintegrated into the group, especially not with the father, Luzi now at the age of almost one, so with the weight of 80 kilos he had to be moved. This is why in a modern zoo these hand-breedings are performed only exceptionally. Luzi came to a French private zoo, where, he unfortunately and unnecessarily died of a failed worm treatment.

After retirement, Luzi's foster mother Zita Steinemann first lived on the Zolli premises and later in a nursing home. She remained interested in the zoo life until her old-age. The fuss about *Knut* in Berlin evoked a lot of memories and emotions of the time with Luzi in her. Out of sheer sympathy, she sent a small gift to *Thomas Dörflein*, whereupon he called and asked for her advice. She herself was modest and never stood in the spotlight, although she has written a bit of zoo history.

* The author is a former veterinarian at the Basel Zoo.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)

role of playmate, the French bulldog *Bichette* supported the challenging task of the foster parents – a 24-hour-job! Luzi was two days old, the size of a guinea pig and weighed 675 grams. He was a worm in comparison to his more than 300-pound mother and he was blind, deaf and toothless. Until then there was little experience since only three hand breedings had been successful, 1942 in Prague, 1955 in Frank-

furt and 1960 in Vienna-Schoenbrunn. A year after the successful artificial breeding in Basel the breeding of a young female animal succeeded in the Zurich Zoo, as well.

Meticulously, the Steinmanns wrote their Basel diary on this strenuous breeding. This served also to be of use for the Berlin Zoo, because the white midget needed the bottle every two hours during the day and every three hours at

Inseparable: dog and bear

hh. Since *Luzi* lived in *Steinemann's* flat, *Bichette*, the French Bulldog, was beside herself with excitement. But first she was allowed to look at little *Luzi* only from a distance; and yet she would have so much liked to mother him. When *Luzi* squeaked, *Bichette* was so worried that she began to cry pitifully. She even interpreted its comfortable hums, typical for young polar bears, as a whimpering, that brought her almost to despair.

It was not until *Luzi's* 50th day of life that the dog lady could finally help taking care. After the bottle she licked his muzzle clean with great zeal, she accompanied him on his exploration walks through the flat and stayed beside him watching, once he had laid down. Her taking care went so far that *Bichette* had a phantom pregnancy. She wanted to breastfeed the little bear and shuffled it again and again under her body, to offer him the teats. This had to be suppressed,

so that she did not produce "wild milk".

However, as time went by *Bichette* experienced that her pampered foster child was no longer a puppy, but an adolescent predator. At every opportunity, *Luzi* bit her legs. Visibly disappointed by so much ingratitude she withdrew more and more from her mate, who was getting ever more rude and supervised him only from a safe distance. This marked the unromantic end of an unequal animal friendship. Viewed in a sentimental mood: a sad moment. Realistically assessed: a logical happening.

(Translation *Current Concerns*)



The French bulldog "Bichette" always wanted to be close to the goings-on. (picture P. Steinemann)